Bower Reflects on Integrating Two Theoretical Frameworks

May 27, 2016

As a Yale university graduate student back in the mid 1950s, APS Past President and William James Fellow Gordon H. Bower was being indoctrinated into the then-dominant learning theory of Clark Hull, who sought to explain learning and motivation by scientific laws of behavior.

But he became a devotee of William K. Estes's statistical theory of learning after meeting him at a 1957 workshop.

At the APS-Psychonomic Society W. K. & K. W. Estes Lecture at the 2016 APS Convention in Chicago, Bower delivered a 60-year retrospective on his attempts to integrate or translate Hull's theory into Estes's statistical framework. He also talked about his many years of collaboration with Estes, who passed away in 2011.

"Not only was he a superbly creative scientist, he had an enormous impact on our field," Bower said. "I feel lucky to have known him so well for so many years."

Today, Bower is one of the premier experimental psychologists and learning theorists. His research focuses on the ways that various cognitive processes – such as imagery, emotion, and reading and language comprehension — relate to memory, learning, and reasoning. His work earned him one of the United States's highest scientific honors, the National Medal of Science.

Look for more detailed coverage of this symposium in the Convention issue of the *Observer*, coming this summer.